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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet guides New York City parents through the basic steps in choosing a public school for their children. Every child 6 years of age or older in New York City must attend school, and children may be enrolled in kindergarten the year they turn 5. A limited number of preschool spaces are available. Legal residency is not a requirement for public school attendance in New York City; children who are undocumented aliens or the children of undocumented aliens are eligible for the New York public schools, as are homeless children. The steps to consider in choosing a public school are: (1) find out the school district in which the child resides; (2) find the school the child is entitled to attend; (3) find other schools or programs that may be appropriate; and (4) apply to schools in other districts if so desired. Extra steps may be needed for disabled children, children who need bilingual instruction, and gifted children. Parents who have chosen a school should remain involved to ensure that their children receive the best possible education. Helpful telephone numbers are listed. (SLD)

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How to Choose a Public School

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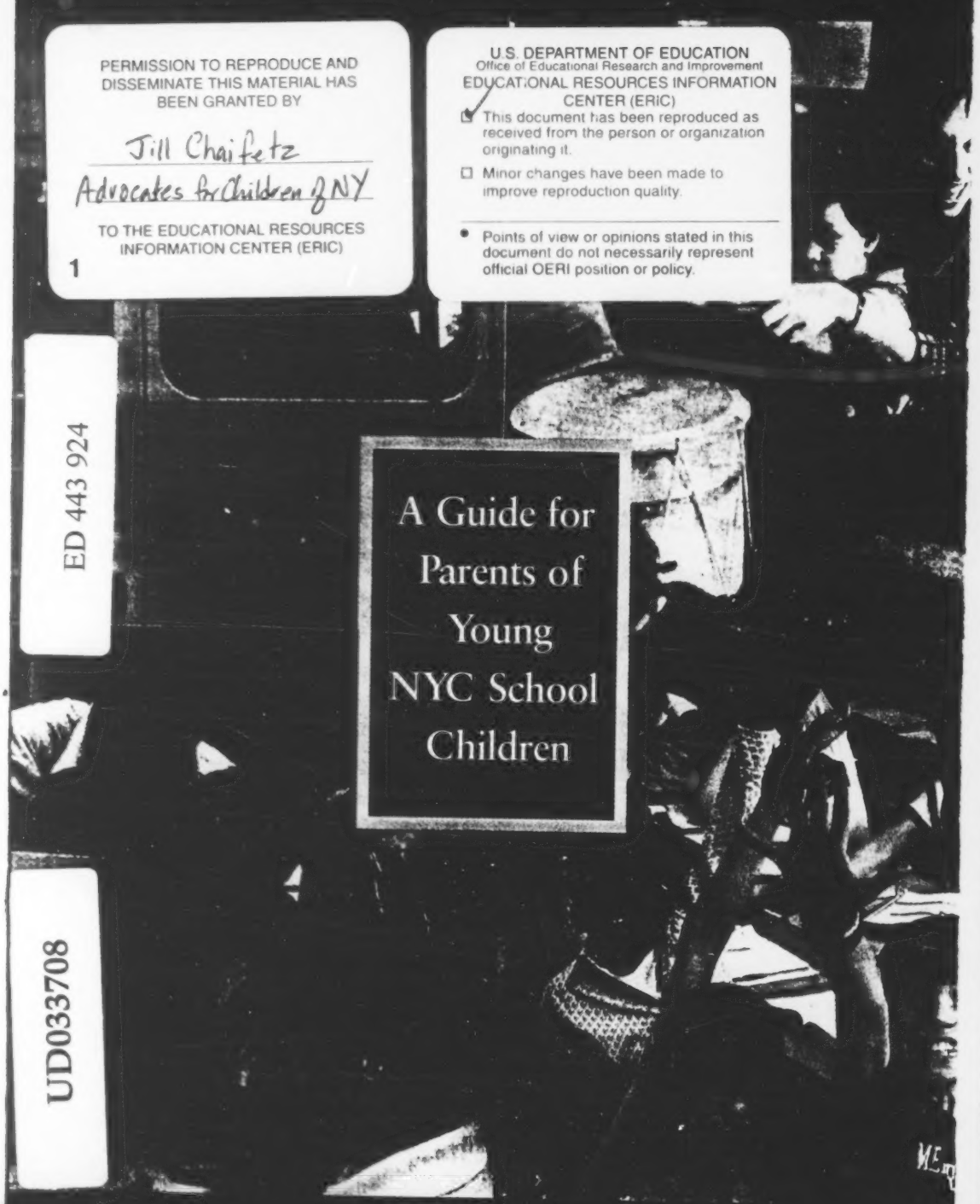

A Guide for Parents of Young NYC School Children

▶ This pamphlet guides you through the basic steps in choosing a public school for your child. It does not list, rate or recommend specific schools. But it contains important information that will help you find the school that's best for your child.

▶ Most likely, you will have questions that aren't covered in this pamphlet. However, it's easy to obtain answers. Refer to the helpful telephone numbers on the back page.

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First Things First: Is your child entitled to attend New York City Public School?

▶**AGE REQUIREMENTS:** Every child who is six years of age or older and lives in New York City must attend school. However, you may enroll your child in kindergarten the year he or she turns five. In addition, some schools offer pre-kindergarten programs beginning at age four. Keep in mind that spaces for these early-childhood programs are limited and you must sign up in advance.

▶**RESIDENCY:** Legal residency is not a requirement for public school attendance. If you or your children are undocumented aliens, your children may attend New York City public schools without showing documentation of legal residency.

▶**SPECIAL NEEDS:** Children who have physical or learning disabilities, do not speak English or are intellectually gifted all have the right to attend New York City public schools. Moreover, there is a wide array of special K-6 and pre-school programs for youngsters with special needs. To learn what options are available to you, call your district (see STEP 1 and STEP 2 on pages 3 & 4) and ask to speak with the District Administrator for Special Education, for Bilingual or Bicultural Education or for Gifted and Talented Programs. Also, see "PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS" on page 9 of this pamphlet.

▶ **HOMELESS FAMILIES:** Children who are homeless and live in shelters, hotels or motels are entitled to attend New York City public schools. **For information and assistance, you may call the Office of Students in Temporary Housing, at** (718) 935-3352

SPECIAL NOTE: **Free/reduced-rate meals.** Many children are eligible to receive free or reduced-rate breakfasts and lunches at school. If you think you may qualify, make sure to complete and return the confidential federal form that is sent home from school with your child at the beginning of the school year.

Step 1

Find out what district you live in

New York City has 32 community school districts; each district has several elementary schools. **If you are not sure which school district you live in, you can find out easily by calling** (718) 935-3566.

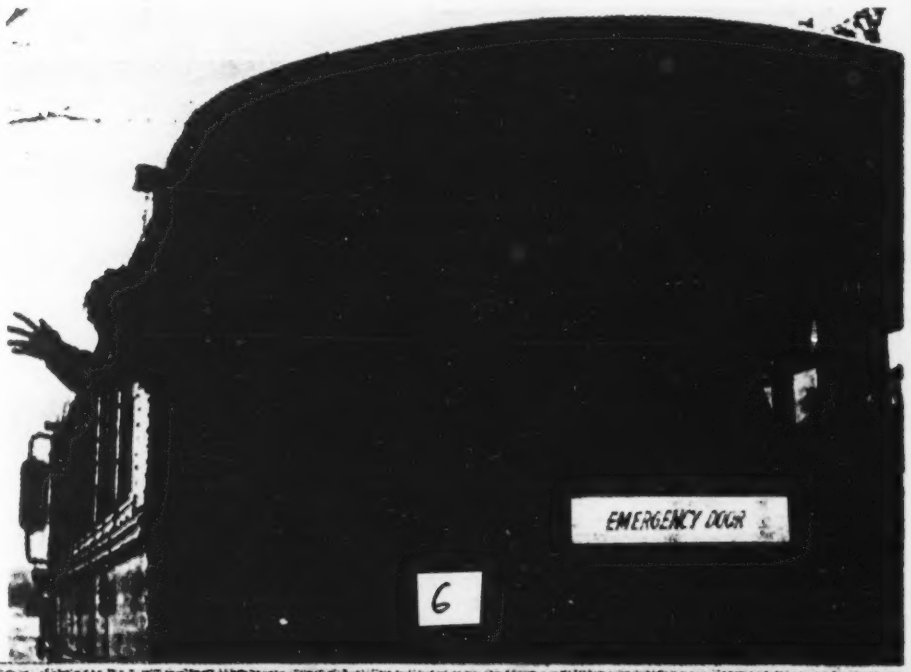
Step 2

Find out which school within your district your child is entitled to attend

Uncertain which school your child should be attending? Simply call your district office and tell them your address. On the basis of where you live, the district office will tell you which "zoned" school your child is designated to attend.

Call your district office to find out about when and how to register your child. All community school district office telephone numbers are listed on the back page of this pamphlet.

Children in kindergarten, first and second grade are entitled to free school bus service to and from school if they live at least one-half mile from their zoned school or if they live in a shelter, hotel or motel.



Step 3

Find out about other schools or programs in your district that may be appropriate for your child.

The New York City public schools offer a modified "Parent Choice" system. This means that you may apply to enroll your child in a school other than your zoned school, within or outside your district.

You may want to explore other schools if the one serving your neighborhood doesn't meet your child's specific needs. Every school is different from all others. You may prefer a school other than your zoned school. Or, you may want to send your child to one of the "magnet schools" throughout the city that offer enriched programs designed to attract students from the local district and from outside the district.

About half the school districts publish a brochure describing all the schools within the district, as well as programs for children with special interests, abilities and needs. **If you're interested in the "Parent Choice" option, call your district office** and, if it has such a publication, request a copy. If not, ask to speak with someone who can provide you with

information you need about different schools in the district.

To learn more about a specific school or program, call the school directly to arrange a visit. When you're there, you'll have an opportunity to tour the facility, meet with teachers and administrators, observe classes and request an application.

You may find out the standardized reading and math test scores for any school by calling the Office of Educational Research. The number is on the back page of this pamphlet. You may also get school "report cards" with test scores and various statistics about each school from the school's district office.

If you decide to apply to a different school in your district, get an application from the school and complete and return it as soon as possible. Also make sure to ask your district office if you must get a variance, or permission to register your child in a school other than the zoned school.

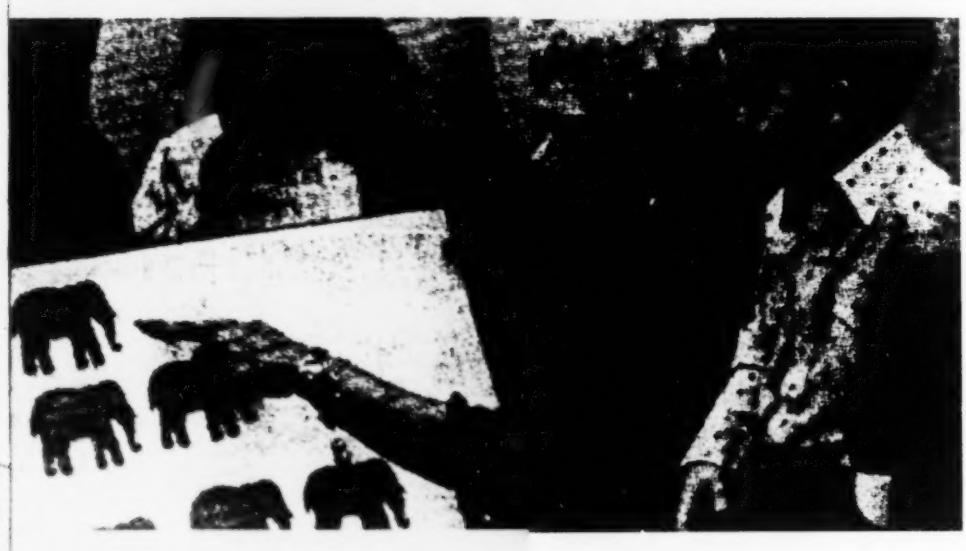
N.B.: If your child attends a different school or a special program in your district, he or she might not be entitled to free school bus service, regardless of how far you live from the school. Make sure to clarify this with both the school and your district office.

Step 4

Applying to schools in <u>other</u> districts

Under the Parent Choice system, you may decide that you want to send your child to a school in a <u>different district</u>. Each district has its own rules for accepting children from other districts. But, as long as there is room, you have the right to have your application considered fairly.

To pursue this option, call the district office for the school(s) in which you are interested and ask for information and details on application procedures (including filing deadlines.) **District telephone numbers are listed on the back of this pamphlet.** Then call the school to arrange a visit.



Make sure to file the application by the deadline. If your child is already enrolled in your own district, you will also need to file a transfer request with the superintendent of the new district.

Except for certain situations, free school bus service is <u>not</u> available to elementary-school children who transfer to a different district.

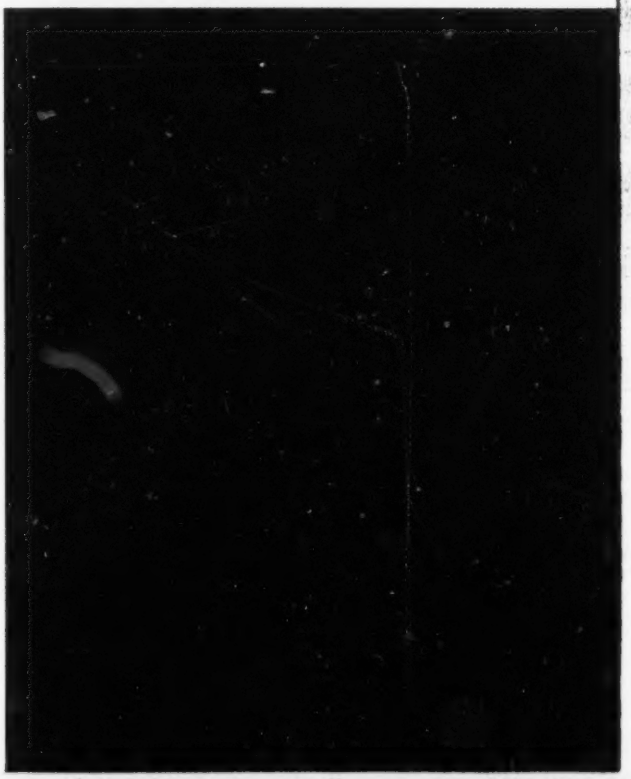
Extra Steps: Programs and services for children with special needs

▶ **CHILDREN WITH EDUCATIONAL DISABILITIES:** Beginning in pre-school — and, in some cases, at age three — children with educational disabilities are entitled to a free evaluation and a free public education in the least restrictive environment.

Each district has a Committee on Pre-School Special Education (CPSE), which arranges evaluations and recommends programs and services. You have the right to work with the CPSE to make an "Individualized Educational Plan" (IEP) for your child.

The rights, rules and regulations for children with disabilities can be difficult to understand. **If you have a question or need help setting up an appropriate IEP or school plan, call Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., at (718)624-8450.**

Children with educational disabilities may be placed in schools other than their zoned schools. If so, they will be provided with free transportation to and from school.



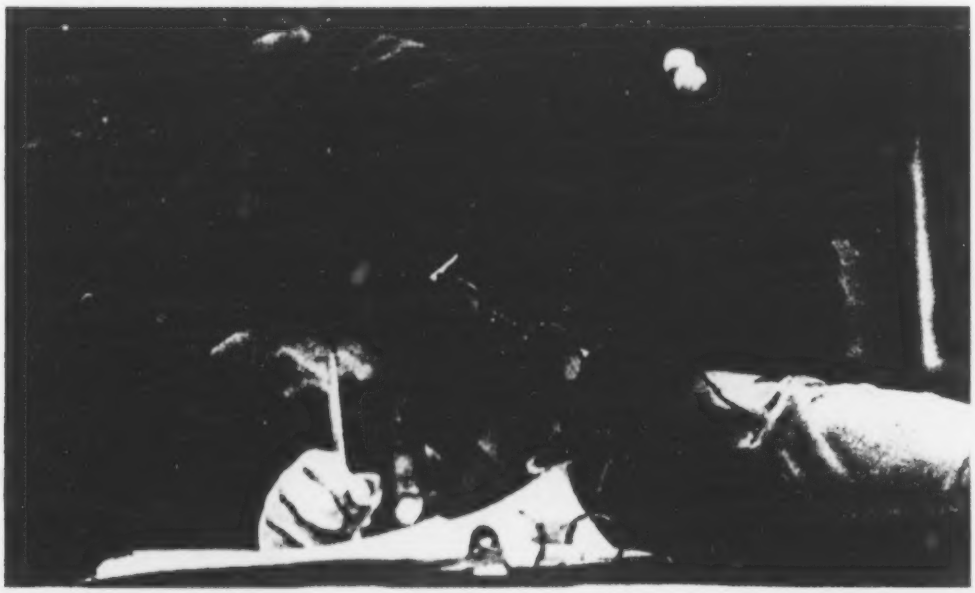
▶CHILDREN WHO NEED BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION: Children who speak little or no English are entitled to receive bilingual education. Instruction is offered on three levels, depending on whether the child has no knowledge of English, some fluency, or a good command of the language. If you think your child can benefit from bilingual education — and to make sure your child is placed in the right program — **call your district and ask to speak to the Coordinator of Bilingual or Multicultural Education.**

▶GIFTED CHILDREN: Almost every district has special programs for gifted and talented children. Some start in kindergarten, others in first or second grade. Each district sets its own rules for determining eligibility. While all districts ask for a special application, some also require an I.Q. test, some require a school visit and some require both. If your district requires an I.Q. test and you cannot afford to pay for it, ask the district office about applying for a fee waiver.

You may apply to the Gifted and Talented schools and programs in any district. To learn about them, how to apply and how to arrange for your child to take any mandatory tests, **call the districts you are interested in and ask to speak to the Coordinator of Gifted and Talented programs.**

Children enrolled in Gifted and Talented programs and schools are entitled to free bus service, whether or not they attend school in their own district.

Last But Not Least: Stay involved



Being part of your child's education is rewarding and helps ensure that your child receives the best education possible. Once your child is in school, stay involved:

- ATTEND PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES: You'll have an opportunity to meet with your child's teacher twice a year at Parent/Teacher conferences. This is an excellent time to help the teacher understand your child better and learn from the teacher how you can help your child at home. Of course, you don't have to wait for Parent/Teacher conferences. Your child's teacher will be happy to speak with you by phone or in person whenever it's convenient for both of you.

▶ JOIN THE PARENT ASSOCIATION OR PARENT/ TEACHER ASSOCIATION:
Every school has either a PA or PTA. Joining gives you a way to communicate with the school administration about teachers, classes, safety, special projects, your child's progress and any other concerns.

▶ HELP YOUR CHILD WITH HOMEWORK: Homework is part of your child's education. Help make it complete by checking to make sure assignments are completed and helping when needed. **If you or your child need assistance, call Dial-A-Teacher from 4:00 -7:00 p.m. The telephone number is on the back of this pamphlet.**

▶ COMMUNICATE: When you have questions or concerns, talk to your child's teacher, guidance counselor, the assistant principal, the principal or the district office. Make sure your questions are answered. **If you cannot get the assistance you need, call Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., at (718) 624-8450.**

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Helpful Telephone Numbers

To Learn Your District, NYC Board of Education Office of Zoning and Integration (718) 935-3566

To Obtain Test Scores, Office of Educational Research (718) 935-3777

For Homework Help, Dial-A-Teacher (212) 777-3380

To Get Assistance For Homeless Children, NYC Board of Education Office of Students in Temporary Housing (718) 935-3352

Advocates for Children of New York, Inc. (718) 624-8450

COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

District 1	(212) 602-9701
District 2	(212) 330-9400
District 3	(212) 678-2880
District 4	(212) 860-5858
District 5	(212) 769-7500
District 6	(212) 795-4111
District 7	(718) 292-0481
District 8	(718) 409-8100
District 9	(718) 681-6160
District 10	(718) 584-7070
District 11	718) 519-2614
District 12	(718) 328-2310
District 13	(718) 636-3204
District 14	(718) 963-4800
District 15	(718) 330-9300
District 16	(718) 919-0323
District 17	(718) 604-4200
District 18	(718) 927-5100
District 19	(718) 272-8033
District 20	(718) 692-5200
District 21	(718) 714-2500
District 22	(718) 368-8000
District 23	(718) 270-8600
District 24	(718) 417-2600
District 25	(718) 281-7600
District 26	(718) 631-6900
District 27	(718) 642-5700
District 28	(718) 830-8800
District 29	(718) 978-5900
District 30	(718) 777-4600
District 31	(718) 390-1600
District 32	(718) 574-1125

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